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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [KDEM](#) [ECON](#) [SOCI](#) [RS](#)
SUBJECT: SUBJECT: MEDVEDEV, COMING OUT OF THE SHADOWS?

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Classified By: Ambassador William J. Burns. Reasons: 1.4 (B) & (D).

¶1. (SBU) Summary: Dmitriy Medvedev, heir apparent to the Russian Presidency, continued his whistle-stop tour of the country, touting his vision in Krasnoyarsk and Izhevsk of an economically vibrant country, with a strong market system, and without the corruption that permeates society today. His interview this week in "Itogi" magazine offered a rare glimpse of the candidate's foreign policy views, which sounded (not unexpectedly) Putinesque. He accused the British Council of engaging in espionage, took indirect jabs at Ukraine's chaotic democratic process, and advocated a firm foreign policy that "shows teeth" to insure that Russia gets its proper respect. The tone of the comments reflected Medvedev's more "sophisticated" style, but his points suggested that in international affairs, "Putinism" will guide Russian foreign policy for some time to come, wherever Putin himself is sitting.

One Week to Go

¶2. (SBU) Medvedev's campaign -- if that is what one might call it -- continued to dominate the television and print media, with only limited coverage of his competitors, mainly during "official" campaign commercials and debates. There is little evidence in Moscow or the regions that a presidential campaign is underway -- an election commission official in Kemerovo Oblast told us that none of the campaigns were using billboards because it was "too expensive." There was no sign that a presidential campaign was less than two weeks away during a February 12-13 visit to Volgograd (septel). Medvedev's Itogi comments follow his Krasnoyarsk speech on February 15 that stressed the importance of freedom and highlighted his "liberal" approach to economic development, based upon the four "I"s: infrastructure, innovation, investment, institutions (reftel).

The Itogi Interview

¶3. (SBU) Perhaps to motivate the "average" Russian to head to the polls on March 2, Medvedev's campaign this week paid for a long interview in Itogi magazine with the candidate. (Itogi is a popular middle-brow news weekly, filling a niche similar to that of "Time" magazine.) In a style similar to Putin's "First Person" interviews, Medvedev explained his roots and provided an "inside" view of his life, hobbies, and interests. He discussed his family -- underscoring their modest origins -- and described a happy childhood spent with his parents and grandparents, filled with fun on the streets of Leningrad and a love of knowledge, inherited from his academic father. Medvedev comes across as a "regular guy" who loves his hometown, soccer, and his wife and son. He said that he was secretly baptized at age 23 and from that point

he "started a different life."

¶4. (SBU) Medvedev's responses to policy-related questions spoiled the homey atmosphere, however, and gave an indication of the candidate's views on foreign policy. He underscored that he supported "everything" that had been done in the past eight years and approved of a more assertive foreign policy, suggesting that giving in on even "minor" issues like the British Council helped to foster an image of weakness abroad.

His sharp criticisms of the British Council as an organization involved in espionage give little hope that Medvedev will move quickly to shore up relations with London -- a refutation of the hopes of the more pro-Western elite, such as electricity monopoly head Anatoliy Chubays. Medvedev also dismissed European concerns about Russian energy leverage with his insistence that Gazprom meets all its contractual obligations, but acknowledged that gas and oil (as well as "bombs") gave Russia stature on the international stage.

¶5. (SBU) Speaking about domestic politics, Medvedev unequivocally advocated a continued strong presidential system, with an offhand swipe at Ukraine's unsettled political situation as what might happen if Russia were to try a parliamentary approach. When asked about his views about managing Putin as Premier, Medvedev said that the two of them understood that such an "alliance" would work only in an atmosphere of mutual trust and partnership.

Comment:

¶6. (SBU) The publication of the Itogi article coincided with Kosovo's unilateral declaration of independence, a time when no candidate in Russia would be in a position to advocate a more pro-Western foreign policy. The choice of a popular magazine and Medvedev's folksy manner suggest that the article targeted the broader public, whose general mood has been trending "left" domestically, but supportive of "tough talk" abroad. As such, his comments may well have been crafted with the Kremlin's recognition of the challenge in "getting out the vote" in a contest with a foregone conclusion. Medvedev's advocacy of a firm line with the West may also have been designed to polish his bona fides as a Russian patriot with the more hard-line members of the elite. That said, the Itogi interview likely disappointed those here who are anxious for a foreign policy that is more measured and less combative.

BURNS